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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000275

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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (02/12): "A FIRST READING OF
ELECTION RESULTS... MORE SETTLEMENTS"

Main Stories:

Al Quds and Al Hayat Al Jadida lead with news of a "political impasse" in the selection of a new Israeli Prime Minister. Al Ayyam am also provides front page coverage. Al Quds reports on "competition" between Livni's Kadima party and Netanyahu's Likud party in trying to form the next coalition government. Al Hayat Al Jadida describes the action as a "battle for Prime Minister." Al Ayyam leads with news that a Hamas delegation arrived in Cairo on February 12 to deliver the group's final response to Israel-Hamas Gaza truce proposals and will meet with Egyptian intelligence chief Sulayman. Meanwhile, Al Quds' front page reports that Israel and Hamas continue truce talks in an effort to reach agreement before Israeli Prime Minister Olmert leaves office. In other Cairo meetings, Al Quds' front page reports that Fatah and Hamas met on February 11 and agreed to stop politically-motivated arrests and media incitement, ahead of the "national dialogue conference" scheduled for later this month. U.S. reactions to Israeli elections feature on all front pages. Wire stories quote State Department spokesman Robert Wood noting that the U.S. is looking forward to working with the new Israeli government, regardless of which party leads it. Al Ayyam's front page cites news agency reporting about a February 11 phone call from President Obama to Israeli President Peres in which Obama welcomed working with the next Israeli Prime Minister, whoever that may be.

In international reactions, all front pages quote French Foreign Minister Kouchner predicting that Livni of Kadima will form the next government in Israel despite the "victory" of the Israeli right. Belgian Foreign Minister De Gucht throws his support behind Livni because, "she is more capable of achieving a peace agreement with the Palestinians," according to reporting, while Israeli newspapers

predict a new government under Likud's Netanyahu, according to Al Ayyam's front page. In related news, EU foreign policy chief Solana calls on Israel's incoming government to resume "serious peace talks", and leave behind the current, "crisis management mode," Al Hayat Al Jadida's front page reports.

Palestinian reactions to Israeli elections are captured on all front pages. Al Ayyam quotes Palestinian Authority (PA) Premier Fayyad stating on February 11 that any Israeli government must meet the demands of the international community. Al Quds' front page quotes PA Minister of Interior Al Yahya charging that, "Israeli society lacks a culture of peace," and insisting that Israeli elections do not decide the fate of Palestinians. The paper also reports that PLO factions see a "drift towards rightwing policies" in Israeli elections results. Meanwhile, Hamas calls all Israeli parties "hostile to our people" and Islamic Jihad calls the elections, "a new phase in Israeli hostility against Palestinians," the paper notes.

Al Ayyam's front page reports that Egypt has outlined principles for upcoming Palestinian unity talks and has distributed them to all Palestinian factions. The principles highlight areas of common interest such as forming a national consensus Palestinian Authority (PA) government, holding legislative and presidential elections, reforming PA security services and "reactivating" the PLO.

Al Ayyam highlights on its front page that the Hamas press office in Gaza has allowed Al Ayyam's print daily to be distributed in the Gaza Strip for the first time in six months.-----

BLOCK QUOTES:

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1) "Al Quds editorial is titled, "A first reading of Israeli election results"(02/12): "If the new American administration actually realized that it has a strategic interest in achieving peace and then realized that the continued occupation is bad for U.S. interests, it would move... to put an end to the extremism that is openly growing in Israel... for us [Palestinians] the victory of the extremist rightwing means more Israeli settlements, stalling and negative practices. We should have strategies ready to face that situation..."

2) Abdullah Awwad opines in Al Ayyam under the title, "Why won't Fatah re-invent itself?"(02/12): "If the [Fatah] leadership has reached the end, then it must acknowledge that and tell its members and supporters that it is now up to them, Fatah has nothing more to give... Fatah is in turmoil at all levels... The leadership needs to stop admiring itself in the mirror...and wake up to the reality outside."

WALLES